

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

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PM-07 H-03 L-03 NSC-07 PA-04 PRS-01 SS-20 USIA-15

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FM AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3189

INFO AMEMBASSY QUITO

C O N F I D E N T I A L GUAYAQUIL 397

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, EC

SUBJ: GUAYAS GOVERNOR COMMENTS ON PROBLEMS ON THE COAST

REF: A. GUAYAQUIL 355; B. GUAYAQUIL 340

1. DURING APRIL 19 CONVERSATION WITH CONGEN, GUAYAS MILITARY GOVERNOR, R. ADM. RENAN OLMEDO GONZALEZ, COMMENTED ON SERIES OF PROBLEMS CONFRONTING COASTAL AREAS. HE LISTED RISING FOOD COSTS AND FOOD SHORTAGES, ATTEMPT TO RAISE BUS FARES, MAY DAY PARADE, AND RETURN TO CLASSES OF HIGH SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN EARLY MAY AS REASONS FOR HIS CONCERN FOR GROWING TENSENESS OF SITUATION IN GUAYAQUIL.

2. GOVERNOR SAID MOST SERIOUS DIFFICULTY WAS LACK OF RICE. CONTENTED THAT ALL OTHERS COULD BE SOLVED BUT THAT HE WAS NO RAIN-MAKER AND COASTAL DROUGHT (REF A) WAS VERY GRAVE PROBLEM.

3. LOCAL BUS COMPANIES SEEKING TO RAISE FARES FROM ONE SUCRE TO 1.40 SUCRES. OWNERS CLAIM THAT ALL OF THEIR COSTS (LABOR, SPARE PARTS, MAINTENANCE) HAVE GONE UP AND FARES MUST ALSO INCREASE.

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AFTER FOOD COSTS, TRANSPORTATION EXPENSES MOST CRUCIAL BUDGET ITEM

FOR URBAN POOR. BUS FARES ALSO SENSITIVE ISSUE WITH STUDENTS. LOCAL TEACHERS' UNION AND STUDENT GROUPS HAVE PROTESTED PROPOSED INCREASE. GOVERNOR SAYS WILL NOT PERMIT OWNERS TO UP BUS FARES.

4. OLMEDO EXPRESSED ONLY MILD CONCERN FOR MAY DAY MARCH TO BE STAGED BY COASTAL LABOR UNIONS (REF B). SAID MANIFESTATION WOULD BE TIGHTLY CONTROLLED.

5. HIGH SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS RETURN TO CLASSES IN MAY AND GOVERNOR EXPECTS USUAL AGITATION AND DISTURBANCES. PROBLEM MORE SERIOUS THAN USUAL BECAUSE OF DETERIORATING FOOD SITUATION AND THREAT TO INCREASE BUS FARES.

6. COMMENT. DURING HIS 2 YEARS AS GUAYAS GOVERNOR, OLMEDO HAS DONE EXCELLENT JOB IN KEEPING SITUATION CALM. HE HAS MOVED QUICKLY AND FIRMLY TO SQUELCH THREATS TO PUBLIC ORDER. HE OBVIOUSLY INTENDS TO CONTINUE THIS POLICY. STUDENT LEADER WALDIMIR TORRES WAS ARRESTED APRIL 22 AS RESULT OF HIS STATEMENTS AT APRIL 19 GATHERING WHERE HE URGED STUDENTS TO BURN ANY BUS THAT UPPED ITS FARE. OLMEDO'S ABILITY WILL BE SORELY TAXED THIS SUMMER BECAUSE OF SERIOUS PROBLEMS AFFLICTING THE COAST.
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